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A
DISCOURSE,

READ BEFORE

The Rhode-Island Medical
Society,

ON

Their Anniversary,

SEPTEMBER, A. D. 1813.

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BY Henry C. Turner.
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" Vitam, artemque meam caste & sancte ducam."

Trans. HIPPOCRATES.

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1813.

DISCOURSE, &c.

Vitam artemque meam caste & sancte ducam.

Trans. Hifi.

FROM the real necessities, or the imaginary wants of man, is derived every Art that adorns, every Science that ennobles humanity.—As they relieve these necessities, or contribute to his pleasures, is their importance to be estimated ; but by their effects in enlightening the mind, and purifying the heart, must we appreciate their dignity. How noble, and how necessary then, is that profession, to which, many of the arts owe their origin, and most of the sciences are subservient :—A profession, whose object is Health, that inestimable blessing, which alone gives zest to the pleasures of life ; without which, wealth and power are even to their votaries contemptible ;—science loses its charm, and life itself becomes a burthen.

To the Science of Medicine, civilized man is indebted, as well for the sources, as for the power of enjoyment ; for without her fostering hand, the arts and sciences would disappear ;—the social compact would be dissolved ; instead of happy villages, flourishing towns, and opulent cities. this earth would exhibit nothing, but the lonely wildness of pristine desolation ; and man himself, in worse than a savage state, the wretched victim of disease or accident, would wander through the world, a prey to hopeless despondency.

The profession of Medicine teaches its members, to substitute, for the natural cruelty and selfishness of man's character, a benevolence and an humanity truly God-like. By her requirements, their souls should be occupied by one principle alone ;—the love of doing good.—Their lives, the extension of a single action—the relief of the distressed.

Whoever ventures to approach the Temple, where the Deity of medicine presides, should tear from his heart, the passions that degrade his nature.—He should rigidly observe the rule engraven on its portal, “ Entrance here is only permitted to pure souls.” Should he violate it, should he steal a spark from the sacred fire of its altars, it would prove to the world, the destructive blaze of a baleful meteor, not the mild effulgence of a benignant star.—Her requirements are great, and high are the responsibilities of her votary.—To

him, the miserable victim of disease, looks for safety, with a confidence almost too great for human frailty to sustain ;—to him, in the fulness of his zeal, the seasons have ceased to change ;—his frame is insensible to the scorching blaze of a summer sun ;—the freezing blast of winter, cannot chill the current of a heart, warmed by active benevolence.—The day is occupied by his labours, the night brings not to him the blessings of repose.—However great may seem these requirements, however important these responsibilities ; however extensive these privations, his reward is as certain, as it is ample.—Fortune may, perhaps, elude his grasp ; but the esteem, the veneration, which always court the acceptance of worth and talents, afford him a joy, than which, in this world, there is but one greater.—This also is so surely his, that it is beyond the reach of power, or accident ;—it is the blessed consciousness of doing good.—It is this alone, which enables him to sustain hunger and thirst, and the privations of repose, and of domestic felicity ;—this alone supports him, through the heart-rending scenes his duty compels him to witness.

Such is the dignity and importance of the profession we have adopted.—That it is far from having attained the perfection of which it is susceptible, we fondly hope ; since premature death, still defies the boasted power of the Physician ; disease still baffles his utmost skill.—That it is imperfect, we cannot but believe ; since discoveries are daily making, which open the way to new and to more important ones ;—since diseases, which were formerly considered incurable, now readily yield to a more skilful method of treatment ; and some of them have been entirely struck off from the catalogue of human ills. That it is liable to many and great abuses ;—that the profession has been sometimes brought into disrepute, and the progress of its advancement always greatly retarded by them, the History of Medicine will not permit us to deny. Its annals furnish too many instances of the injuries it has sustained, from the pernicious theories that have from time to time prevailed ;—too many instances of the ignorance and depravity of its members ;—too many instances of the successful impostures of artful and designing men.—As the prevention of these evils, and thereby the promotion of medical science, constitutes the principal object of the Institution we are assembled to commemorate ; it cannot be deemed improper to attempt an investigation of their causes ; nor presumptuous to point out their remedies.—In order the more effectually to do this, it will be necessary, to take a cursory view of the origin and advancement of the profession.

The origin of the practice of Physic, is necessarily involved in great obscurity. It undoubtedly took its rise, from the accidental discoveries, made by individuals, of the effects of remedies on the human body : hence we may safely conclude, that it was almost coeval with the admission of diseases into the world. So early as the fabulous ages of Greece, we find it mentioned as an Art, and *Æsculapius* honored as its founder, with the worship of a God.—It is probable, that he was the first, who, devoting his life to the pursuit of medical knowledge, carefully collected and arranged the history of those cases, which the gratitude, or philanthropy of individuals, have caused to be inscribed on the pillars of their temples. From the facts thus collected, and the result of his own observations, he drew certain conclusions of the nature of the remedies already known ; and laid down rules for regulating the art, he had thus happily established.

His sons *Podalirius* and *Machaon*, inherited the secrets of his art, as well as the spirit of his genius. They accompanied the Heroes of Greece, to the siege of *Troy* ; and renowned for their bravery in the field, and venerated for their skill in the art they practised, their names have been immortalized by the pen of the Divine *Homer*—Their posterity, officiating as priests in the temples of their great progenitor, affected to conceal, under the mysteries of religion, those secrets, which inconsiderable as they were, had thus already become objects of fraud and avarice. But the Philosophers of Greece, even at that time, famous for their researches, could not pass unregarded the changes, to which the human body is liable ; nor in their enquiries into the nature of things, forbear attempting the investigation of their causes. At this time, therefore, the art of healing, was in the hands of three distinct classes of men. The *Asclapiadæ*, who in their practice, were governed by rules derived from experience alone, and were in the strictest sense of the word, *Empirics* ;—the *Philosophers*, who affected to explain all the phenomena of disease, solely by theory ;—the other class, was composed of those men, who boasted the possession of secret remedies ; but who in reality, ignorant of every thing, but human folly, presumptuously practised the greatest impositions with success, on the weak and the credulous.—These men, though ever detestable for their vices and impostures ; have in every age of the world been considerable for their numbers ; and are the more to be feared, because the laws do not reach them, and they are insensible to the mortification of disgrace.

It was this state of things, that prepared the way for the

Great Hippocrates ;—a man, who if a life unparalleled in the annals of the world, for its usefulness, and its virtues, can give claim to greatness, is justly entitled to the first rank among the benefactors of men.—In him, was blended the happiest assemblage of the rarest virtues, and the brightest talents.—Nations have contended for the honor of his birth ; but the little Island of Cos, the true place of his nativity, has derived more glory from his name alone, than Athens, from all her Statesmen, and all her Heroes.

A descendant of Æsculapius, he was early instructed in the knowledge of the Empirics—he was familiar, not only with the hypothesis of the Philosophers ; but with all the learning of the time ; and disdained not to profit of the information, even of the impostors, who crowded the cities of Greece.—“ His genius soon led him to conceive one of those great “ and important ideas, which serve as eras in the history of “ science : this was, to enlighten experience by reasoning ; “ and rectify theory by practice. Improved by this new method, the art of physic exalted to the dignity of a science ; “ made a more certain progress in the path opened before it ; “ and Hippocrates, by the felicity of his genius, effected a revolution, which altered the face of medicine.”—His works, of which several are still extant, astonish, after a lapse of more than Two Thousand years, by the accuracy of his descriptions, and the knowledge he displays of diseases and their remedies. He was particularly distinguished by a taste and genius for observation ; the faculty of uniting in his researches, an astonishing activity, with the most indefatigable constancy ; and a discernment so acute, and a sagacity so wonderful, that his mind seemed to act, rather by instinct, than reflection.—The qualities of his heart, were by no means inferior to those of his head ; and he was idolized for his virtues, long before he was deified for his wisdom. Nothing can be more interesting, than the candour with which he speaks of his errors, and of his failures.—Careless of his own fame, his object in his writings, was evidently the advancement of the science, and the establishment of a system for posterity, built upon such a theory, as the deductions of reasoning, and the result of experience, equally confirmed, thus laying the foundation of a superstructure, which, having truth for its basis, has successfully been raised by his followers ; and although enlarged in its dimensions, and beautified in its finishing, still in its unity, retains the design of its great projector.

For several centuries, the world enjoyed the blessings bequeathed to it by Hippocrates, in their greatest purity ; and

emoluments and honors, were the reward of his disciples.—These soon offered a temptation to needy and avaricious men, too flattering to be resisted; they, aware of the impositions to which the profession of medicine is peculiarly liable, from the ignorance and credulity of mankind; too indolent to bestow the application necessary for celebrity, and too unprincipled to practice the virtues enjoined upon its votaries, formed the design of substituting artifice for integrity, and mystery for science; and thereby of converting a noble profession, into a disgraceful traffic.

These causes, conspired to retard the progress, and sometimes to defeat the benevolent purposes of the art.—But it was not from the gross impostures of some, or the petty vices and disgraceful ignorance of others, that the profession sustained its greatest injuries—the obstacles they presented were far from being insurmountable—in the hands of the real disciples of Hippocrates, its progress though necessarily slow, was still certain. But it was about to receive a check;—the glory of that great man was about to be obscured, by the envious clouds of error, controlled and directed by the irresistible hand of Genius.

Near six hundred years after Hippocrates, Galen appeared in the school of Alexandria.—In the Ptolemæan library, he became versed in all the knowledge of the ancients; but unfortunately for medicine, there also he imbibed the doctrine of the Peripatetics, and in attempting to confound the observations of the “divine old man,” with their absurdities, his acute and fertile genius—his vivid and frantic imagination—his pure and elegant style, enabled him to succeed too well.—He extended to medicine a fostering hand—new splendour seemed to adorn her course—her eye kindled with a brighter flame—her cheek mantled with a fresher tide; but alas! contagion followed his embrace—that flame, was the consuming fire—that flash, the evidence of disease.—His writings, like that stream, which flows from a tainted source, convey no salutary draught to the thirsting soul.—They have been productive of more injury to the world, than the skilful practice of a long life could ever repair.

The doctrine of the Peripatetics—the evil genius of medicine—seemed destined to hold perpetual sway over the science it had subdued.—Not only the Latin, but the Arabian school also, was poisoned by it, and for near thirteen centuries, burthened by useless and fallacious hypothesis, it scarcely experienced any advancement, in consequence of the pride of opinion of a single individual. At length, however, in the fifteenth century, the works of Hippocrates revived in Eu-

rope with the revival of Literature ; and in consequence of the discoveries of the immortal Harvey, which established their truth, they obtained that consideration, they so justly deserve. It would be vain and fruitless, to enumerate the names of those, who, since that period, have adorned the profession ; they have been imitators, with different success, of one of the great examples already before us.

Although from the date of their discoveries to the present time, Medicine has experienced an advancement, unequalled in its history—has numbered many great and illustrious men among her sons ; although institutions, calculated to promote her best interests, have, in many parts of the world, been established ; still the abuses, to which it is liable, continue to exist. The venders of secret remedies still continue their impostures ; and are as considerable for their numbers, as contemptible for their pretensions. Still there are men, sufficiently presumptuous and avaricious, to attempt to use the instruments of power, without the knowledge requisite for their direction.—Men, who, meriting the indignation and abhorrence of all the good, are guilty of the meanest vices, and the most contemptible practices, to secure that popularity, which they so little deserve. Still wild and extravagant theories, though less dangerous than formerly, continue to deceive and perplex the student in Medicine.

For the remedy to the first of these abuses, we must look, though perhaps in vain, to our own Legislature ; for experience teaches us, that mankind are ever more prone to invite, than to detect imposition. For the two last, by far the most considerable, the remedy is simple, and easily attainable ; it did not escape the wisdom of those, who framed the institutions of this Society ; it is to be found in the difficulty of procuring admission to the practice of Medicine. But since this difficulty, in similar institutions, has frequently been evaded, by men every way unqualified for the profession, let those to whom is entrusted the momentous charge of examining candidates, most rigidly perform its duties. But more than this, let those who take upon themselves the instruction of pupils in medicine, exercise the utmost caution in selecting the youth, who is to receive so sacred a deposit : let them observe the rules for forming the Physician, laid down by the Father of our Profession himself.—“ Life is so short, and the art we practice so long, that the study of it should be begun in earliest youth. Have you a pupil you would educate for the practice of medicine, examine leisurely whether his genius be adapted to the art. Has he received from nature an exquisite discernment, a sound judgment, a character

“ in which mildness and firmness are combined, the love of
 “ labour, and an inclination to what is amiable and praise-
 “ worthy, you will entertain well-founded hopes. Does he
 “ suffer with the sufferings of others ; does he naturally feel
 “ the tenderest commiseration for the woes incident to his
 “ fellow mortals ; you will reasonably infer that he will be
 “ passionately devoted to an art that will instruct him in what
 “ manner to afford them relief. It is not enough that you
 “ initiate him into the most profound secrets of nature and
 “ art ; he must swear to preserve in his manners and prac-
 “ tice an incorruptible purity, and strictly keep his oath :—
 “ Without the virtues requisite to his profession, he can nev-
 “ er discharge its duties —What are these virtues ? I scarce-
 “ ly except any one, since his functions are so honorable, that
 “ they require almost all the noblest qualities of the mind
 “ and heart.”—Let these rules be observed, let him be taught
 duly to estimate the gifts of fortune, let him study rather to
 deserve the approbation of his own heart, than to court the
 praise of others.—In short, let the Practitioners of Physic be
 in reality, what they would wish to appear ; then shall the
 objects of this institution be fully accomplished ; then shall
 the Profession of Medicine prove to the world its choicest
 blessing, and its brightest ornament.

Med. Hist.

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